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ABSTRACT

To determine the current role of laboratory schools in the United States, the 123 existing laboratory schools were surveyed. Forty-seven percent completed and returned the questionnaire. They reported that the chief function of their school was instruction, followed, in order of emphasis, by preservice teacher education, research, and inservice teacher education. A range of instructional methodologies was used by these schools, with 46.6 percent using a combination of traditional and experimental techniques. In provisions for teacher education the methods used in the laboratory schools were clinical or mini-teaching experiences, observations by students, and student teaching. The most prolific researchers in laboratory schools were school faculty members, followed by other college and university faculty members. Research was also done by cooperative efforts between laboratory school and other faculty members, as well as by students. Inservice education was accomplished primarily by internal training conducted by laboratory school teachers. However, conferences of local, state, regional, and national levels were also used, as well as external consulting services. Some of the schools reported that their continued existence was questionable. Funding appeared to be a major problem. It is suggested that laboratory schools should expand research and inservice activities, and improve teacher education efforts. (JD)

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LABORATORY SCHOOLS: UPDATED OR OUTDATED

By

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Economics in higher education have led to retrenching of programs and personnel. In this transition, the campus laboratory school is often "first to go." In other situations, lab schools are being phased out on a gradual basis. Typically, the response offered by administrators is that public schools can provide similar pre-service teaching experiences at a fraction of the cost. Proponents of laboratory schools, however, contend that the role of laboratory schools is more expansive than the confines of pre-service teaching experiences. Demonstration of innovative methodologies, in-service training, and research are identified by updated schools as fertile ground that supports their continued existence.

Educators in the past and present have differing conceptualizations of the laboratory schools. The need exists to study the historical roles and present status of laboratory schools if we are to speculate their future.

The Past

The first normal schools in the United States, established at Lexington, Barre, and Bridgewater, Massachusetts in 1839 and 1840, provided facilities for laboratory teaching. As the normal school concept spread, a laboratory school became a part of each of these institutions (Eubanks,1931).

David Berkins Page, head of the Albany State Normal School, has been credited as being the first individual in the country to have a clearcut notion of the place

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of the laboratory school in teacher education. His position was that the school's purpose was "to afford each normal pupil an opportunity of practicing the methods of instruction and discipline inculated at the normal school," (Harper, 1939).

The role of laboratory schools in the United States began to expand around 1883. At that time, Colonel Francis W. Parker became principal of the Cook County Normal School in Chicago. A kindergarten and an elementary school for practice teaching functioned as an integral part of this program from the very beginning. Additionally, the philosophy of this school included experimentation and investigation of teaching (Hughes, 1959). This expansion of the laboratory school's role is illustrated in three other schools that developed before the turn of the century:

1. In 1887, the Horace Mann School was opened at Teachers College, New York City, and became a school in which professors of education might "experiment with the curriculum and methods of teaching as professors of science experiment in the laboratory," (Perrodin, 1955).

2. John Dewey developed a laboratory school while serving as head of the Department of Education and Philosophy of the University of Chicago (1894-1904). The aim of this school was "to further the application of scientific concepts and methods to the conduct of school work," (Hughes, 1959).

3. In 1889, Teachers College established a second laboratory school, the Speyer School, with a "typical" student body. This allowed a more direct application of conclusions, materials, and methods to public school classrooms (Perrodin, 1955).

Hughes (1959) documents the development of laboratory schools in the first half of the twentieth century. At the time of his report, 252 college/university controlled elementary laboratory schools operated in connection with teacher education institutions. In 1970, Howd and Browne reported an existence of 208 laboratory schools, affiliated with 196 colleges and universities in all but four

states. Their report identified a shift in interest from utilization of schools for student teaching to increased interest in research, experimentation, participation, and in-service education.

The Present

In 1980, the National Association of Laboratory Schools listed 123 existing laboratory schools. To determine the current role of laboratory schools in the United States, these schools were surveyed, (Page, et. al., 1981). Forty-seven percent completed and returned questionnaires.

Participants in the study were asked to write a percentage figure beside various categories that would represent their school's involvement with that particular role. The overall percentages for each category are listed below:

Research	13.7%
Teacher Education	35.4%
In-Service	12.6%
Instruction	38.3%

Participants in the study also identified percentages within each of the four categories to represent involvement of their particular school with specific functions.

A range of instructional methodologies was utilized by laboratory schools. Survey respondents indicated that 31.2% of the instruction provided students was traditional. Experimental approaches accounted for 22.2% of the instruction, while 46.6% of the instruction was a combination of traditional and experimental techniques.

In provisions for teacher education, 28.6% of the time was used for clinical, mini-teaching experiences prior to student teaching. Observations by students accounted for 24.5% of the time. Student teaching ranked third in utilization with 23.3%. The combination of several other teacher education provisions netted

23.6% utilization.

The most prolific researchers in laboratory schools were laboratory school faculty members who produced 33.4% of the projects. Other college/university faculty members contributed 28.6% of the research. Cooperative efforts of laboratory school and other faculty members resulted in 20.6% of the projects and student-developed research resulted in a 17.4% contribution.

Respondents reported that in-service education, the process of developing and/or refining teaching skills, was accomplished in a variety of ways. The primary method was internal training for laboratory school teachers with a rating of 37.7%. Conferences of local, state, regional, and national levels accounted for 24.3% of in-service education. Additional external consulting services offered school systems by laboratory school faculty members provided a 20.3% utilization. Other options for in-service education combined for 17.7%.

The findings of this study support the fact that today's laboratory schools are indeed serving a range of purposes. However, research and in-service education continue to be very minor roles.

The Future

Although not asked for in the survey discussed above, some of the laboratory schools reported that their continued existence was questionable. Rationalizing funding appears to be a major problem. Interest exists in the expansion of roles for remaining laboratory schools, especially in the area of research. However, a running jump into several unknown research areas could be detrimental. Hunter (1970) suggests that "laboratory schools of the future will need to major in specified areas where they can mount considerable research effort, possibly more in a few related areas, and leave to other laboratory school the areas where they could direct only minimal and, therefore, wasteful effort."

Wiles (1958) states that one function of the laboratory school is "to contribute stimulation and service to other schools." Updated laboratory schools carry this in-service function out in a variety of ways including demonstration, consulting, and publication.

Updating of laboratory schools need not only to include expansion in research and in-service areas, but also improvement in teacher education utilization. The traditional pre-service experiences utilize fewer laboratory school classrooms and students when teacher education enrollments are diminished. As these enrollments decrease, expanding opportunities for laboratory school utilization should increase. Instructors teaching undergraduate and graduate courses throughout the teacher education program need to be encouraged and guided in the utilization of the laboratory school. Additionally, evaluation of traditional pre-service experiences to bring about optimum laboratory school usage is important.

Providing a good educational program for children who attend laboratory schools has traditionally been a priority role. However, strengthening areas of research, in-service education, and teacher education should contribute to this goal rather than diminish it.

Outdated laboratory schools are following the path of the dinosaur. Updating of schools will require concentrated efforts in evaluation and improvement of roles. Survival of laboratory schools is dependent upon taking immediate steps in this direction.

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